

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6072

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Natural Resources & Parks, January 30, 2014

Title: An act relating to providing for a biennial update on forage fish.

Brief Description: Providing for a biennial update on forage fish.

Sponsors: Senators Rolfes and Ranker.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources & Parks: 1/21/14, 1/30/14 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6072 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Pearson, Chair; Liias, Ranking Member; Dandel, Hargrove, Hewitt, Kline and Parlette.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Role of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). DFW serves as manager of the state's fish and wildlife resources. Among other duties, DFW must protect and manage fish and wildlife including establishing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife.

Forage Fish Generally. Information from DFW describes forage fish as a variety of small schooling fish that serve as food for many species of fish, birds, and marine mammals. Several forage fish species are fished recreationally and commercially in Washington. Forage fish species present in state waters include the following:

- northern anchovy;
- Pacific sand lance, also known as candlefish;
- Pacific herring;
- Pacific sardine; and
- a variety of smelt species.

Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) Forage Fish Management Policy. In 1998 the Commission adopted a policy on forage fish management that establishes:

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- a desire to maintain healthy populations of forage fish species;
- a conservative approach to fisheries if insufficient information is available or the condition of the resource is poor; and
- that fishery management plans will consider the need to supply forage fish for ecosystem needs.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Substitute): DFW must provide a biennial forage fish report to the Legislature. The report must be developed within existing resources, and be delivered by June 30 of each odd-numbered year.

The forage fish report must contain information to include the following:

- a status report on current forage fish population assessment efforts;
- a profile of relevant recreational and commercial fisheries;
- economic data for the relevant fisheries, including significant markets and known potential risks;
- the status of research efforts on the impact of forage fish removal on marine ecosystems;
- any known gaps in existing research efforts; and
- the status of DFW's forage fish conservation efforts.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY NATURAL RESOURCES & PARKS COMMITTEE (Recommended Substitute):

- Modifies a required population assessment in the report to a status update on population assessment efforts;
- Modifies a requirement to identify certain marine ecosystem impacts to a status update on known relevant research efforts;
- Requires identification of known gaps in forage fish research efforts; and
- Removes language prohibiting the expenditure of State Wildlife Account funds if the report is not submitted by January 1, 2016.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This bill would provide valuable insight into a crucial part of the ecosystem that is often overlooked. Moreover, this bill would deliver important current information to decision makers at all levels of government on the up-to-date status of all forage fish. This bill would also provide an important contribution to the science necessary to monitor healthy levels of fish and to restore the Puget Sound ecosystem to full health. One of the chief gaps in monitoring the Puget Sound's ecosystem is in forage fish ecology and contribution.

CON: The cost of this bill is prohibitive, especially until sound science can be established proving its necessity. The implementation aspect of the bill is unclear. Forage fish populations are shared across the West Coast, and it would be impossible for Washington State to manage these populations alone. If the bill were to be redesigned as a progress report and take advantage of existing state and federal programs, then the cost would be far less prohibitive.

OTHER: The cost of the bill is prohibitive. Furthermore, there is no scientific evidence to support that a problem exists. It is simply too difficult to monitor wild fish populations, especially with the limited budget and resources at the state's disposal. The bill also has the potential to negatively impact thousands of jobs. This bill should be tabled during this short session and instead members should convene a workshop on forage fish resources in Washington.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Rolfes, prime sponsor; Naki Stevens, Sound Action; Marc Daily, Puget Sound Partnership.

CON: Michele Culver, DFW.

OTHER: Al Carter, Ocean Gold Seafoods.